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STATE FOR PRM/AFR AND PRM/MCE/ICRC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2018
TAGS: [PREF](#) [ICRC](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: ICRC REQUESTS U.S. SUPPORT TO RETURN TO OGADEN

REF: STATE 5906

Classified By: ACTING COUNSELOR DAVID REIMER FOR REASONS 1.4 B&D.

¶1. (C) Summary: Refugee Officer (RefOff) met with ICRC officials to discuss ICRC's ongoing efforts to obtain clarification from the Government of Ethiopia (GOE) as to why ICRC was expelled from the Ogaden some eight months ago. ICRC reported that their meeting with the State Secretary of Foreign Affairs on March 13 had resulted, once again, in an unsatisfactory response. ICRC requested U.S. help vis-a-vis the GOE, although ICRC would prefer U.S. intervention be delivered informally. ICRC suggested the U.S. could urge the GOE to provide a response to ICRC of its investigation, which ICRC believes is largely focused on one ICRC staff member, and to outline a path for their return to the Ogaden. ICRC is approaching the U.S. only at this time for its support. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Refugee Officer (RefOff) met with Daniel Duvillard, ICRC Head of Operations for East Africa, and Alain Schmid, Deputy Head of Operations, to discuss ICRC's ongoing efforts to obtain clarification from the Government of Ethiopia as to why ICRC was expelled from the Ogaden some eight months ago. Duvillard reported that their meeting with the State Secretary of Foreign Affairs on March 13 had resulted, once

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again, in an unsatisfactory response. Duvillard mentioned that it appears the GOE is focusing its investigation largely on one former staff who has already been transferred to another assignment. Nevertheless, according to Duvillard, the GOE continues to punish ICRC as an institution for what it characterized as a misinterpretation of the actions of one staff member.

¶3. (C) Duvillard said that ICRC's President, Jakob Kellenberger, had requested previously PRM's support to return to the Ogaden, but that ICRC had wanted to exhaust all channels to try to obtain the government's report of their investigation before deciding to formally request U.S. intervention. Duvillard said that ICRC now believes it is time to seek U.S. support with the GOE. Duvillard added that ICRC's Director of Operations, Pierre Kraenbeuhl, is planning to write a letter to the GOE, outlining the evolution of the problem, describing ICRC's efforts to discuss the conclusions of the government's investigation, and to complain that after so much time, the GOE has still not provided ICRC with an adequate response of its investigation nor has the GOE indicated if they will negotiate ICRC's return to the Ogaden. Duvillard said that ICRC wanted to keep the issues of the return to Ogaden separate from their discussions to regain access to detention facilities and is only seeking U.S. help for the Ogaden issue.

¶4. (C) RefOff asked Duvillard how ICRC envisions U.S. intervention. He said ICRC still did not want the U.S. to intervene of "behalf of" the ICRC, but said the U.S. Ambassador in Addis had previously offered to intervene "informally," during discussions with senior government officials. He thought the U.S. could discuss with the GOE the status of their investigation, to encourage the GOE to provide ICRC with a response to its investigation, and to indicate to ICRC whether or not the GOE would allow ICRC to return to the Ogaden. Duvillard said he is not convinced the GOE wants ICRC to return to the Ogaden, citing ICRC's own internal operating guidelines and conditions under which ICRC agrees to work in any given region. He said the GOE may feel obliged to loosen current restrictions on UN agencies in the Ogaden if the government were to approve ICRC's return.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) Duvillard said that ICRC is only approaching the U.S. at this stage for assistance. Still, ICRC's wish to keep any U.S. intervention informal would indicate ICRC is reluctant to enter into a direct confrontation with the GOE as has happened in the past (Note: Duvillard mentioned that the State Secretary had commented to ICRC that the GOE is not affected by outside pressure. End note.). PRM should consider how best to intervene with the GOE and possibly to seek more input from the local ICRC office on the details of any such message to be passed to the GOE.

TICHENOR